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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [OSCE](#) [UNGA](#) [MD](#) [GG](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: DAS BRYZA DISCUSSES GEORGIA AND NAGORNO-KARABAKH
WITH DFM KARASIN

Classified By: AMBASSADOR WILLIAM J. BURNS FOR REASONS 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (C) Summary: On October 23, DFM Grigoriy Karasin told visiting EUR DAS Matthew Bryza and the Ambassador that Russia was increasingly worried about the "anti-democratic" tendencies in Saakashvili's government and Georgia's possible attempts to take control of the separatist regions by force in the coming weeks. Karasin said that the "Okruashvili affair" confirmed that Georgia's "domestic affairs are not in order," and he criticized the U.S. for not sufficiently addressing these problems. Karasin also urged Bryza to dissuade Saakashvili from any attempt to assert control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia by force, stressing that Russia would respond "with adequate measures" if the Georgian leader proceeded with such "adventurism." Bryza rejected Karasin's claim that the U.S. was soft on Georgia and provided several examples of U.S. efforts to moderate Georgian behavior and policies. Bryza informed Karasin that the Georgians have agreed to release the seven detained Abkhaz peacekeepers, and an announcement on their release would likely be made during the October 25 talks between the Georgian Minister Bakradze and Abkhaz FM Shamba. Karasin and Bryza also discussed the Nagorno-Karabakh negotiations. End Summary.

Nagorno-Karabakh

¶2. (C) DFM Karasin initiated the meeting by seeking DAS Bryza's assessment of the Nagorno-Karabakh negotiations. Bryza said there was not a lot of movement in the talks. He observed that Armenian President Kocharian seems to have decided to pass this issue on to the next president, following elections. However, Bryza stressed that there is still some room for optimism. He commented that the general atmosphere for movement ahead remains in place, noting that the U.S. and others have been able to prevent Kocharian from completely removing himself from N-K talks. Bryza cited as an example Kocharian's favorable reaction to the Co-Chairs' compromise proposal on the Lochin Corridor. Bryza said the U.S. hoped to facilitate an agreement by the parties on this proposal before the Armenian elections. Bryza stressed that the negotiators should continue to focus their efforts on committing Armenia and Azerbaijan to a set of basic principles.

¶3. (C) Bryza pointed out his positive talks with PM Sargsian on October 21 in Washington as another reason for cautious optimism. Sargsian agreed that Armenia had no other choice than to agree to a common set of basic principles as negotiated over the past three years, recognizing that he should not "work from scratch" following the elections. Sargsian opined there is no logical alternative to the principles currently on the table. Bryza commented that Sargsian is approaching the conflict with a fresh mind and even observed that Sargsian seems more self-assured than Kocharian.

14. (C) Karasin agreed with Bryza's assessment of the state of play in the N-K negotiations and Sargsian's constructive attitude, but cautioned that we should wait until Sargsian becomes president to evaluate his commitment to resolve the conflict. Karasin said that the U.S. and Russia should continue to press Armenia and Azerbaijan to focus on an N-K political settlement, underscoring the volatility in the region. Bryza said the U.S. shared Russia's concern, noting that the U.S. successfully convinced Azerbaijani President Aliyev to refrain from "war rhetoric."

Georgia

15. (C) Turning his attention to Georgia, Karasin stressed that Russia remains extremely concerned about the precarious political situation in Georgia and the USG's "unwillingness" to address the clear deficiencies in the Saakashvili government.

"Georgia's Domestic Affairs Clearly Not in Order"

16. (C) Karasin said Russia could not understand why the U.S. refused to criticize the "blatant anti-democratic" tendencies in the Saakashvili government. Karasin asserted that the arrest of former Defense Minister Okruashvili proved that it is "premature" to characterize Georgia as a democratic country. Karasin argued that Okruashvili's "politically motivated arrest" and the subsequent forced confession infuriated "many political circles" in Georgia. Karasin doubted the "Okruashvili affair" would spark another revolution in the country but was certain the political instability would only be exacerbated. Karasin urged the

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U.S. to apply maximum pressure on Saakashvili, asserting that Georgia's "domestic affairs are clearly not in order."

17. (C) Bryza rejected the accusation that the U.S. was soft on the Saakashvili government, pointing out that U.S. pressure on Saakashvili to deal with Okruashvili's "adventurism" eventually led to Okruashvili's dismissal. Following the defense minister's arrest, Bryza stressed that the U.S. was "blunt" with Saakashvili, making it clear that he should not only tolerate opposition groups but ensure their legal and political standing. Bryza shared with Karasin U.S. efforts to institutionalize democracy in Georgia, including successfully convincing Saakashvili to establish a judicial reform commission that would report to the President and the Speaker of Parliament and the lowering of the threshold for entry into the Georgian parliament. Karasin was pleased to hear that Bryza regularly meets with a wide range of opposition figures in Georgia.

18. (C) Bryza also drew attention to his own press statements following the Okruashvili arrest as an example of U.S. willingness to address publicly questionable political developments in the Saakashvili government. Bryza said he told the press that Okruashvili's arrest was a very serious matter, rule of law must be observed, and that politics should not get in the way of due process. In response to Karasin's concern about Bryza's alleged press statements about U.S. support for Okruashvili's arrest, Bryza assured Karasin that he was misquoted. However, Bryza said the U.S. did not believe that public condemnation of Saakashvili for the Okruashvili arrest was warranted because the Georgian government's side to the story is plausible, e.g., that Okruashvili announced the formation of his political party in a bid to deter his arrest as the GOG's investigation reached its conclusion.

Saakashvili's Aggressive Handling of Separatist Regions

¶9. (C) Karasin said Russia is even more concerned about Saakashvili's attempts to establish Georgian control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia. He said Russia has received information that the Saakashvili government is planning a major operation in the end of November/early December to take by force the two separatist regions. The alleged build-up of Georgian forces in the conflict regions, including artillery and tanks, only reinforced Russia's concern. Karasin warned that Russia would respond with "adequate measures" to any Georgian attempt to take control of the separatist regions by force. Bryza underscored the U.S.' strong opposition to an armed solution to the conflicts and assured Karasin that the U.S. has repeatedly relayed this message to Saakashvili.

¶10. (C) Karasin reiterated Russia's familiar list of other examples of Georgian "provocations," including the August 6 missile incident and the detention of the seven Abkhaz and two South Ossetian peacekeepers. Karasin criticized the U.S. for not "following through on its promises" to address Russian concerns, such as the release of the Abkhaz and South Ossetian PKF and the issuance of a U.S. visa to Abkhaz de facto Foreign Minister Shamba.

¶11. (C) Bryza pushed back, citing the United States' strong support of the JCC negotiating process on South Ossetia as one of several examples of the U.S.' commitment to a negotiated settlement on the conflicts. On the August 6 missile incident, despite Russian claims, the evidence did not support Russia's version of the incident. On the contrary, evidence assembled by the independent experts group strongly indicated an incursion on August 6 from Russian airspace by two Russian aircraft. Karasin did not push back. Bryza also informed Karasin that the U.S. was working hard to secure the release of the seven Abkhaz peacekeepers and it appeared that the Georgians would announce their release during the October 25 meeting between Shamba and Georgian State Minister for Conflict Resolution Bakradze. Karasin was pleased about this development, but cautioned that the legal process to release them cannot "take months." Bryza also noted that the U.S. has talked to Saakashvili about the release of the two South Ossetians, but the Georgians refused to compromise on this issue, given that the two South Ossetians are Georgian citizens and violated Georgian law.

¶12. (C) Bryza disputed Karasin's claim that the U.S. promised to issue Shamba a visa at a certain time, noting that the U.S. has been clear on the need for the Abkhaz to first demonstrate its commitment to make progress in negotiations with the Georgians. Bryza added that the Friends remain convinced that Shamba should travel to New York only when there is momentum in the negotiating process. Bryza thought a meeting between Abkhaz "president" Bagapsh

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and Saakashvili would be a step in the right direction. Karasin agreed that such a meeting could be useful and thought Saakashvili should suggest one. Bryza pledged to query Saakashvili. Karasin insisted that Saakashvili needed to refrain from his "adventuristic" approach to the separatist regions, highlighting Saakashvili's unhelpful statements following the passage of the recent UNSC resolution renewing UNOMIG's mandate -- which Karasin said Russia was pleased to support -- as further evidence that U.S. had to ratchet up the pressure on the Saakashvili government.

¶13. (C) Bryza conceded it was sometimes difficult to manage Georgian emotions regarding the conflicts, all the more so when Russia was involved with provocative actions such as the August 6 aerial attack and the September 20 shooting incident in Abkhazia. Bryza expressed condolences for the death of the two Russian soldiers, but warned that the participation of CIS peacekeepers in training the Abkhaz military undermined the credibility of the peacekeepers and was highly provocative.

¶14. (U) Karasin closed the meeting with a warm entreaty to Bryza to keep in touch and operate in a spirit of partnership.

¶15. (U) This message has been cleared by DAS Bryza.

Burns